

From the time Africans first set foot on American soil, most of them were prevented from becoming members of mainstream society. In *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857) the Supreme Court even declared that African Americans were not citizens of the United States. It wasn't until segregated units were created in 1862 that they were allowed to enlist in the U.S. Army. As a result of the Civil War, the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution were adopted. These amendments advanced the cause of the freed slaves; ending slavery, making African Americans citizens of the US, prohibiting states from denying equal protection, and prohibiting racial discrimination in voting. These advances, however, were short lived.

By 1877, the Democratic Party had regained the South, and was once again implementing policies to deny African Americans their rights. A variety of measures were used to deny voting privileges to African Americans including, poll taxes, literacy tests and even violence. In addition, a segregated society was created which made sure that whites were totally separated from African Americans in all phases of life, including public accommodation and schools. The federal government did nothing to stop this segregation. In *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of segregated railroad cars. Encouraged, Southern legislators carried their measures to extremes with the creation of "Jim Crow" laws. These actions included passing legislation that required separate drinking fountains and waiting rooms and prohibited interracial marriage. By World War Two, the South, and some parts of the North, had once again become fully segregated.

After 1869, segregation was also the norm in the United States Armed Forces. This policy remained intact through the Spanish American War and World War One but was seriously challenged during World War Two. The NAACP and other African American leaders pointed out the hypocrisy of African Americans, who themselves were victims of racism, fighting against similar policies in Nazi Germany. Military necessity also helped break down racial barriers. Due to a lack of fighting men, African American troops were asked to fight alongside white troops beginning with the Battle of the Bulge. Despite the fact that they served in separate platoons, this experience displayed the abilities of African American soldiers and helped encourage the Army to break with their segregationist policies.

In 1948, President Truman issued Executive Order 9981, directing the US Armed Forces to desegregate as quickly as possible. By the end of the Korean War in 1953, the US Military was almost completely integrated.